THE CHALICE *of the* CHIPPED RUBY

J. Christian Bay

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To the Memory of

Vilhelm Bergsöe

Poet of Romantic Memories

Whose Inspiration

Blossoms Again

In Some Of

These

Pages

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INCEPTION

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The Abbot of Bethany leaned back in his chair and smiled pleasantly at the words of praise and wonder which fell from the lips of his protestant visitor.

"Yes," he said, "it is a matter of management and of government. Government by mutual agreement. But a Trappist monastery is not built in the wilderness by the exercise of these alone. It is a growth — a spiritual growth, first and last. Without that, this com-

munity would not keep together for five minutes."

"But the world is bound to look for the man behind the work," returned the visitor. "There you have a group of fine buildings, an immense farm, a corps of skilled workers, — an organization producing results which any business house would find it hard to duplicate. You all live under the severest rule ever devised for human conduct, yet you all are perfectly content, even cheerful. But, Reverend Father, what becomes of the *men* whose souls conquered this American wilderness? Their lives, their ambitions, their human

interest in profiting by their labor, building up a reputation, a future for themselves — what becomes of all this?"

The monastic house where this conversation took place, hardly seemed the proper locality for the solution of a modern social problem. An hour's ride by rail from a city teeming with modern activity, each man for himself, all striving, as it were, to consume the Earth rapidly and completely; — then the green hills and the forest-clad knobs, and beyond the forest a stone wall; and behind this stone wall a mighty monastery, grand, appalling, venerable as the very

spirit of the Middle Ages. The Abbot himself, in his white Cistercian cowl, despite the modernity of his desk and the office furniture, would have fitted well into a similar milieu of the fourteenth century. Immortal books and pictures looked out from every corner, all colors were subdued as by age. Sunlight fell into the room through latticed windows. Beyond lay the garden, quiet, with shaded walks; the huge, noiseless monastery rose above and beyond, peopled by scores of silent men: Everything indicated the past and not the present, ancient France or Italy rather than modern America.

The Abbot still watched his visitor with a curious little smile.

"Suppose I say to you that the Trappist believes all these things —-true and perfect manhood, strength and happiness — will come to him only when he puts behind him every ambition of advancing his opportunities in this world," he observed. "Suppose I say that he regards the common view of life as a hindrance rather than a help in attaining a higher and more urgent ideal. Will you understand? You may not understand, yet you are free to look into our community, because if you have an eye for truth, you will find

us possessing much blessing foolishly renounced in the World—as indeed we confess to renounce nearly everything that the World prefers. Fanaticism—yes, but with an opportunity for the pleasure I now enjoy: this visit."

"Yet your life seems unreal in this age and civilization. All social forces move in other directions."

"Why unreal?" said the Abbot. "Here is a large estate which we exploit by the most modern and approved scientific methods. Each one of us does his full day's work and contributes his share to the upkeep of our community. In re-

turn, the community protects his ideals. Is it so very unreal to confess to the spiritual and material benefit of a life in silence, restraint, and servitude? Are these less real than loquacity, exploitation and selfishness?"

"But you miss so much—"

"Yes," interposed the Abbot with a smile, "and so do you. All over this magnificent land people sow and reap—and leave their fields and farms as soon as the resources are drained to the utmost. Here we add to the fertility of every acre year by year,—as, within ourselves, we grow better fitted for our own future life."

"True," admitted the visitor, "but you might do all this, and yet remain in the world, instead of segregating yourselves completely from it."

"We are in the world," replied the Abbott, "—very much so. We take every advantage of it, except personal gain. We believe it is due to the dignity of life that our souls act and at last may depart in this form of peace."

"I think you will pardon us outsiders, Reverend Father," said the visitor, "if we doubt the possibility of putting aside all the preferences of the world. I go about this beautiful Abbey with the wish in my

heart to preserve it and to add to its dignity—but also wondering whether the rules of your Order and the spirit of the place will always secure your ideals from being chipped by contact with current events and with the natural rebounds of your human feelings."

The Abbot rose and put his hand on the visitor's shoulder.—"My dear friend," he said, "I feel the same doubt every day. We all do. Let me show you how I was reminded of it only this morning."

He turned and opened a cupboard in the wall. From there he took a magnificent golden chalice and set it on his desk. It was a

beaker of noble, classic lines, gracefully tooled with ornaments and sacred symbols. It rested upon a broad circular base, and in this foot-piece were inserted four gems, a diamond, a sapphire, a topaz, and a ruby.

"What a beautiful chalice!" exclaimed the visitor.

"It is one of our ordinary chalices," explained the Abbot. "For solemn occasions we have other, much finer pieces. This is for general use. It might exemplify any of us, the members of this little community. Surely, flesh and blood created in God's image, may be compared with gold. The jew-

els are a gift from my mother-house, Tre Fontane, near Rome. —Do you see anything peculiar about this chalice?"

The visitor looked closely, turned the chalice about and looked again, but shook his head.

"The ruby is chipped," said the Abbot. "Look again, and you will observe the flaw. Yes, it is chipped on one side. Some careless fellow has done this, probably in the factory where the stones were set, or when it was polished. We never observed the flaw before. Only this morning did I discover it. You will agree that anything which enters into the service of the Lord

ought to be free from blemishes. And this is the lesson I learned and now am reminded of: We may discover any minute some weak spot in our armor of supposed firmness. Now you know the main cause of our silence and seclusion: We live by faith, but our very faith impels us to fear being chipped, as you said, in contact with the World. We may differ on many points, but none of us cares to be found with a flaw. Even you men of the world do not wish to expose yourselves. When you are caught unawares, it at least involves a waste of time. To avoid

exposure — this is one lesson of this Chalice of the Chipped Ruby!"

The guest-master conducted the visitor to the pleasant room named after S. Olberich, and left him to his meditations. Needless to say that these circled about the chalice and the ruby. How had the ruby become chipped?

The meditations grew into fancies, the fancies took definite shape.

Here follows the story of the ruby.

EXPLICATION

EXPLICATION

I

"He gave this to you. —And what then?"

A fly might have buzzed about the window panes in the sewing-room where Dorothea, Niels Trolle, of Borglum Castle, had summoned her daughter Elsbeth. But no fly was buzzing. The mother had stopped her ebony spinning wheel and sat, hands folded, bending a glance of severe scrutiny upon the girl. On the

tiny work table at her elbow, nestled in a mass of magnificent, shimmering flax, lay a heavy gold ring, shaped as a fish with jaws wide open. The jaws held a ruby, and its dull splendor came and went with the play of the shifting sunlight through the green, leaded window-panes.

"And what then?"

The wrinkles of the elder lady's forehead deepened with impatience. Absolute, unquestioning obedience was a child's first duty in the fifteenth century, yet Elsbeth seemed stubborn. Early that morning at fast-break, the girl had pulled a handkerchief from the

snowy folds of her white bodice; and a ring had rolled out on the table. Not a word was said then, but when mother and daughter afterward retired to their customary work in the sewing-room, Elsbeth knew that the hour of reckoning had come.

Monsieur d' Obrange, the French master, had spent an hour of painful discomfort after that fatal fast-break. When the stroke of seven sounded from the grey tower above the moats, and Elsbeth failed to appear for her usual lesson in the library, he fell into that brown reverie which unpleasantly envelops every man, even the

strongest, when Fate seems to overtake him; and there he sat, handsome, sincere, serious, a soft light in his eyes, as the heavy oaken door creaked open. Old Jacob Trolle entered. The door banged.

Behind the closed door of the library the old nobleman raged and roared. But the walls of Borglum Castle were proof against bullets and impervious to angry men's awful words. No echo of the conflict penetrated to the little sewing-room behind the gyneceum.

— Elsbeth lifted her head and looked straight into her mother's eyes. She feared their grey shade of severe authority, but she also

knew that nothing could be gained by parrying. The answer came promptly:

"We plighted our troth."

Long, lingering shafts of sunlight shot across the tiled floor. A starling sounded his flute somewhere. Then from the courtyard below came a muffled tramp of horses and men in wooden shoes.

"Mother," resumed the girl, "François is good and noble, and he knows — oh, ever so much. He has traveled all over Europe, in search of knowledge. And if his father consents, he will make his home here. He said —"

"And you listened to him, know-

ing that you are plighted to our neighbor's son, good Marquard Podebusk, who now serves His Muscovitic Majesty with his wits and his good sword, and will return to claim her from your father's hand. Why, child, you knew this ever since you carried bib and apron."

"But Mother!"

"Speak when you are asked!—You know it cannot be. Life is long. You will forget. You will —" and her beautifully molded, energetic hands smothered the shining cascades of flax, "you will think better," she continued, pensively, as the sweet young face be-

fore her grew more pathetic to look at, "—and prove yourself a nobleman's child. No power on Earth—"

Something had struck the hard tile floor with a clinking jar. It was the ring. Elsbeth quickly recovered it.

"Oh, Mother!" she cried. "You chipped the ruby. François told me this ring was the last gift from his mother, when he left his home in France. —Oh, what shall I do! Who will help me!"

She flung herself on the floor, beside her mother's seat, in a wild outburst of misery.

Once more the old, capable

hands became restless, but this time they stroked the soft, live masses of the girl's hair, scarcely less resplendent than the flax, but infinitely softer. She stirred as if moved by a thought, but somehow the words died within her.

Then the stillness below, hitherto merely dented by the chirp of restless tomtits in the foliage about the ancient walls, was rudely broken. Chains rattled, the heavy draw-bridge between the two towers, at opposite sides of the moat, grated and ground into place with loud wails from rusty hinges.

Then came the thud of a single horse's hoofs on the cobble-stones

in the courtyard and on the bridge. They broke into a gallop beyond.

Elsbeth sprang to her feet and listened with horror in her eyes.

"Mother!" she wailed. "Mother, oh Mother!"

The hoof-beats continued, grew fainter, and died away yonder where the forest began.

The old lady rose. She was very pale.

"Daughter," she said, in great pity and love, "I buried five children, one after the other, before you came—the last of all that were given to me. Can you doubt that your mother's heart is open? —No, Elsbeth, we cannot, must

not, call him back. Love and duty are hard masters, but each time we win means a special blessing arising for us — here or beyond the grave. Come to me, child, your mother will smooth your path of duty. My own little girl, my Elsbeth, — hear me!"

II

[Extract from the Necrologium Sanctae Brigittae Conventi, prope Scanderborgum, *anno* Christi 1507:]

Die XV. Aprilis, Theodosia.

Died this night, in the XXX. year of her life, Sister Francisca, previously known in the vain and wicked World as Elsbeth, Niels Trolle's, and Dorotheae, his wedded wife, their daughter. She lingered in our midst X years and LXI days, a pattern of obedience

and all other virtues. And this is all that need be known of her, forasmuch as no better, or more complete, witness of this Sister's life can be penned. — But as I was staying with her in her last hour, uttering such sacred words of grace and solace as our blessed Order prescribes, and she had made her last confession before Christ and had received in His Name full absolution, and also had received the blessed Sacrament, then she drew from her bosom a ring of gold, shaped as a fish, with a ruby inserted between the jaws of that fish; which ring was suspended about her neck by a thin,

braided gold thread; and she passed the ring into my hands, but uttered no word. — She was buried beneath the East Wall of our Chapel, in the coemeterium, and laid to rest in the robes of our blessed Order. — Maria, mater dolorosa, ora pro nobis, ut coelestem spectantes lucem te solam et filium tuum JHesum Christum moriamur.

III

Vincent Steno, Commandant of Borglum Castle during the Swedish War of 1658, sat in his library, writing, as two soldiers conducted a prisoner into the room. One brief moment his calm gray eyes scanned the group — the two stalwart guardsmen and the ragged peasant boy shifting anxiously from one foot to the other, — then he went on writing.

A wild commotion outside formed a singular contrast to the

seeming quiet within. In the courtyard men ran to and fro, shots rang out from towers and walls, and at intervals there was a deep boom of cannon. Impotent bullets struck the walls now and then, followed by the rattling of scattered mortar and masonry.

"Magnus!" said the Commandant.

One of the guardsmen stepped forward.

"You will take this letter the moment I finish it, and make your way through the secret passage. Be careful about closing the opening in the Hollow Oak in Rold Woods. Pile earth and dead twigs

upon the trap-door. The Germans will have seized the ferry at Hals. Get a boat as best you can — or swim across. You will reach Eskildstorp before dawn. You will deliver this letter to Mademoiselle Inga — personally. Understand?"

The man nodded, but his bearded face expressed some doubt or impatience.

"What is it, Magnus? Speak."

The soldier's immense moustache moved, and his voice rolled across the room like a hymn from a great organ.

"Permission — return — fight — gracious Master!"

"You cannot return," answered

the Commandant. "In two hours this siege will be decided. In five minutes I shall be at the walls with the men. I may fall; but this message must be safe."

Magnus's face was immovable, but sad.

Again the goose-quill moved across the parchment, then ceased with a flourish. Steno scanned the letter:—

My darling Inga! With death and destruction drawing toward us from all sides—"

"Who is this prisoner?"

"By your lordship's gracious permission," said the boy, eagerly stepping forward, "I am the gard-

ener's helper at Saint Brigitta's, in Scanderborg. The Mother Superior is sorely troubled by the advance of the Swedes and Germans. A detachment of dragoons arrived yesterday at dawn and forced entrance to the Convent. They threaten to burn the place unless money and—"

"Be brief!"

"I escaped and walked all night. This morning I managed to swim across the moats to the East gate. As I climbed the wall, they took me. They think I am a spy. — Our dear Mother Superior asks if you cannot send some relief to the Convent."

"How am I to believe what you say?"

The boy pulled at his neckerchief, unfastened something from its frayed edge and laid it on the table. It was a gold ring in the shape of a fish, its jaws yawning over a ruby.

Sir Vincent's hand closed mechanically upon the gem. He did not speak. His glance wandered along the lines of his letter:—

None of us may return from this rat-trap. We are surrounded on all sides. Our orders are to hold the place or die, and not to surrender on any account. If this should be my last opportunity,

I commend thee, dearest Heart

. . . . . .

A boom came. There was a splintering crash, as one of the leaded windows collapsed. Vincent Steno fell forward, over the table. The cannon-ball struck the opposite wall and shivered it.

Magnus jumped forward with a hoarse cry and lifted his master's body from the table. The head was crushed. The right hand still held the letter, now crumpled and spattered with blood. The soldier's immense beard moved, and he uttered a deadly anathema upon the hated enemies. By the aid of his two companions he lifted the

body, laid it on the table and covered it reverently with a cloak. He folded the letter with care and stowed it away within his spacious fur cap,— then, turning to his comrade, he said:

"Report to the lieutenant. I go to Eskildstorp. If relief can be obtained, I shall bring it. — You," to the gardener, "come with me."

Two hours later, when the siege was over, a young German lieutenant strolled into the Commandant's library. Seeing the covered figure on the table, he removed his cap, stepped forward and drew the cloak back. He touched lightly

the dead man's hand — a singularly beautiful hand, white and slender, seemingly better fitted for the pen than for a sword. A ring fell from the impotent grasp of the stiffening fingers and rolled out upon the table. The lieutenant picked it up, not with an impulse to rob the dead, but rather as if taking charge of lordless property, for safe keeping.

IV

Inventory of the property, or Mobilia, of Lieutenant Hans Adolph von Kratzenstein, Lord of Kratzenstein, in Silesia, who served with the Brandenburg Corps during the War of His Swedish Majesty against Denmark, *annis* 1657-1659, and died *anno* 1691, leaving a widow and five children.

656 Flemish Thalers, in specie.

1494 Old Bavarian Marks, in specie.

192 Danish Rosenobles, in specie.

Two pair of French pistols, much used.

Six Nuremberg carbines, in good condition.

One pair of gold spurs, much worn.

One pair of steel *ditto,* rusty, useless.

Eighteen golden goblets.

Sixty five silver *ditto.*

Sundry bracelets of gold and silver.

Sundry and several rings, notably one, of fine French gold, shaped as a fish with open

jaws, the jaws holding a large ruby.

Three coats of Kalemanke, with a lieutenant's distinctions, embroidered in silver.

Eight pantaloons, several much worn.

Thirteen waistcoats, embroidered.

One cocked hat, with gold braid and tassels, tarnished and frayed.

One gold locket, containing a lock of hair.

Odd silver and copper coin, &c.

V

The morning of the first day of November, in the year 1755, dawned upon the ancient city of Lisbon with all the splendor of sunshine and balmy breezes of that favored spot and clime. Gay chanties resounded from ship to ship along the stone quays, as the seamen hurried about their early duties. Peals of sonorous bells rang from lofty, moss-clad steeples of churches whose foundations seemed rooted in the very fundaments of

the Earth. From the heights above the city peasants came singly, or in small groups, each driving before him donkeys or small, sure-footed horses almost hidden beneath huge baskets of vegetables and fruit.

In a small room opening upon a veranda in the upper story of the historical *Escoban* Inn on the edge of the City, a young journeyman printer awoke from his sound slumbers at cock-crow. He stretched himself lazily, rolled over and tried to sleep again, but the call of morning was too persistent. Gerhard Kohl was the young journeyman's name; he had come from

the ancient city of Strasbourg, and now had in mind returning there, with matured ideas of a larger world and with acquired skill in ancient Iberic printing houses, where he had worked for more than a year. We have his own account of the gruesome happenings of that memorable first of November.

"Knowing that my mother was anxious to see me settled at home, I made haste to complete my itinerary. I took a night's lodging at the Escoban, packed my valise, placed it in my room, and walked back to bid a final good-bye to my master and his kind family. On

my return to the inn I found the big bed in my room already occupied by a traveler who snored lustily as I entered, but woke and asked if I insisted on sleeping in my bed alone; if I did, he would make himself comfortable with the doormat, his valise and his cloak. I told him pleasantly to remain where he was, as the bed was large enough to hold seven of us. He thanked me, and I lay down beside him, put my watch under my pillow, said my prayers, and went to sleep at once.

"I woke at dawn and began to dress. But imagine my consternation on finding that my watch no

longer was where I had put it, for safe keeping, as I went to sleep. My bedfellow also was gone. I hurried down and found that he had departed only a half hour before, having hired a donkey to carry him up the mountain-pass. I immediately hired a horse, bought a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine, and set out in pursuit.

"Unforgettable is to me the glorious morning, the vine-clad hills, the bright sun, the birds singing, the eagles soaring way above the tree-tops. As I rode on, I frequently turned back in my saddle and refreshed my mind with parting glimpses of the glorious city. I

recollect thinking that probably I should never see it again. Alas, how true, for as I reached the summit and paused to bid a last farewell to Lisbon,—*the city was there no more.*

"Was I so absorbed in thought, or so intent upon my pursuit of my treacherous companion, that I had failed to hear the roar of the awful catastrophe, or the rush of the waters as they engulfed the lower part of the great town? Could thousands of dwellings, palaces and churches collapse and fall into ruins without my being aware that this dire disaster took place almost beneath my feet?

"I cannot say, but as I write this account, after fifty years, only this impression remains, that one moment the city was there, and the next moment it was gone. Ruin and wreck marked the engulfed districts as far as I was able to see,—yet where I was, the sun shone as before, the foliage waved before the breeze, and I heard the twittering of many birds.

"I was roused at last by the recollection of my quest, and urged my horse forward. Scarcely had I proceeded a half mile than I became aware of a donkey nipping the scanty grass along the roadside a little way ahead. And close by,

leaning against a rock, was my companion of the night before, quietly eating his breakfast, a bottle of wine beside him. I spurred my horse and dashed on, drawing my pistol as I went. He scrambled to his feet, drew something from his pocket and threw it on the ground, whereupon he jumped over the rock and made his escape among the trees and boulders which lined the roadside. I fired my pistol in the air as I quickly reached the spot, to inspire him with a wholesome fear. Then I dismounted, reloaded my pistol and looked about me. The donkey went on grazing, all was still. And

there, on the ground, was the treacherous traveler's hat, his valise, his loaf of bread, his half emptied bottle of wine; also a silk kerchief folded and tied with knots at the ends. I opened this package without hesitation and found that it contained some trinkets, a silver snuff-box — and my silver watch, still ticking, with the key attached by a tiny leather thong. I put it in my pocket, with a grateful feeling, because this watch once belonged to my dear father, who in turn had inherited it from his father.

"No thought of revenge crossed my mind. But I drank what wine

the miscreant had left in his bottle, for I was tired from the ride and the excitement of the morning.

"As I was tying the kerchief, intending to leave the trinkets with the valise, my eye was arrested by a curious ring of gold. It had the shape of a fish, and where the head and tail met, the jaws were opened to the point of yawning. In this opening a ruby was inserted. The workmanship was very old.

"This ring I took from the bundle, as a reminder of this eventful and fatal day. It still is in my possession.

"I pursued my way without further incident, and left my horse

at the first inn at which I arrived. I still remember the name of the village. It was Belehm. Thence I pursued my way on foot, in accordance with the rules of our guild. Great was the consternation wherever I related my tale of that terrible first day of November. On my arrival at Strasbourg, my family and friends hailed me as one miraculously escaped from the vengeance of the Evil One, as indeed I was."

Marginal note in a feminine hand:

"My grandfather told me that he returned and looked over the precipice, before fleeing in terror.

"Anna K. 1810."

VI

On a beautiful, moonlit evening in the year 1832 three artists met in an osteria in one of the numerous by-streets which, at that time, connected the vast expanse of ancient thoroughfares in the Eternal City with the more pretentious Piazza del Popolo. The pretentions, however, stopped short of street lighting. Outdoor exercise in the Rome of those days required, when extended into night, a lantern as well as a cloak; and a handy

weapon under the cloak was not to be despised, for the National Guard and even the Papal Guard patrolled only the thoroughfares, and that with long intervals.

The three artists had discussed the ever-recurring topic of the deplorable decay of contemporary art—a condition evident to every succeeding generation. They agreed that some revival was necessary, some new principle or method must be developed.

"The secret of the Classics," said one, "lies in the grouping of mass-effects. They chose a principle, or unit: the circle or the square, or an oval, and arranged

their scenery according to the relative importance of each unit. The result is that you may cut their work into fragments, and you'll find each fragment a perfect piece of art in itself."

"But that is not the only thing." remarked a dark-haired youth. "Look at William Kohl's hand there on the table—keep your hand quiet, William!—look at the contrast between the red ruby of his ring and the dark blue of his cloak as the hand rests upon it. Mass your materials as you will, but balance your red and blue. Even the ancient potters knew that. Every fragment of their urns

and vases prophesies the gospel of the cardinal colors."

"Stendel is right," said Kohl. "But so is everybody who takes notice of some striking trait in any of the great masters. The chief question is to apply your discovery to your own work. You paint what you see, and as you see it at the time. You don't care for anybody else. You don't even care whether you reproduce the object as it is. All that you care for is the idea you wish to bring out."

Stendel sighed. "Here I have spent the better part of my young life trying to work out the theory of classic drapery," he said, "only

to find that any beggar in Rome can throw his cloak over his left shoulder in a way that defies all my powers."

"Throw on your own cloak now," returned his friend, "and let us go. It is late, and the Piazza del Popolo seems rather unsafe this year."

They arose, lighted their lanterns, nodded to the sleepy host who dozen in his chair, and departed.

The Piazza lay before them, deserted and quiet, moonlit and ancient, — ghostly where tall pines rose over vine-clad masonry and cast their long black images.

"Let us walk with William as

far as the guard house at Ponte Molle," proposed Robert Sinclair, the youngest of the trio. "This place is anything but safe."

But Kohl objected. "I shall not take you one step out of your way," said he. "Why, I might lie down and sleep safely anywhere along the road."

With a nod and a friendly word to each one of his friends he crossed the Piazza and proceeded along the Flaminian Road while Stendel and Sinclair took another direction. The fairy shadows of the moonlight once more were in undisturbed possession of the old square.

Kohl strode on, oblivious of himself, unconsciously absorbing the beauty and stillness of the ancient road. Behind low walls loomed the graceful outlines of dignified mansions, blending in perfect harmony with the shrubbery and surmounted by the dark pillars of stately pines and the wide fans of spreading acacias. As he drew near the ruins of the Crassianus villa he suddenly was roused from his reverie by the feeling that something was at his heels. He swung about, held out his lantern — and smiled to himself. A big cat with nocturnally lustrous eyes stood within the light.

With a soft purr the animal insinuated itself into the man's favor, glided back and forth on noiseless paws and crept about the folds of the cloak. Then it floated away in the dimness of the night and disappeared behind a large barrel close to a house by the side of the road. There was a slight rustle within the barrel, immediately followed by a scratching and a subdued wail. What might be the trouble—had the animal accidentally imprisoned itself in the barrel? Kohl drew nearer and peered . . . . . .

At that moment the faintest sound of a metallic click came to

his ears. He quickly dropped the lantern and drew a pistol from the pocket of his cloak. He scarcely had cocked it than the cover of the barrel was pushed away form within and a jet of flame flashed out into the night. The young man felt a sting in his shoulder, but managed to lift his weapon. Without taking aim he fired it into the barrel almost from the very top. A yell broke the stillness, then all was quiet save for the low wailing of the cat and an occasional moan from within the barrel.

Two hours later the guardsmen from Ponte Molle found the young man, wounded and unconscious, in

the road. Close by lay his discharged pistol, and on his white, slender hand gleamed a gold ring with a ruby. It was a heavy ring, shaped as a fish with its jaws wide open, and the jaws yawned over the sparkling stone.

In an empty rain-water barrel by the roadside was the dead body of a rough-looking man, a discharged pistol in his hand, a disconsolate cat softly wailing, hiding within the folds of his blood-spattered cloak.

VII

They came out of the gate near San Paolo fuori le mura and strolled along the friendly road—past the hedges and ruins, past the little chapel where, according to ancient tradition, Saint Peter and Saint Paul parted, each to face his own martyr's death.

They walked hand in hand, like children, along the old, grey road which runs far into the Campagna. But, unlike children, they had little to say to each other.

"This is the place where I first

saw you, Giovanna," said William Kohl, as they approached a bend in the road, "and here we will part."

The girl withdrew her hand and stopped.

"You will go back to your people," continued the artist, "and I bid farewell to Rome to-morrow, with my picture. I owe you a world of gratitude, little one,—more than I can say—"

She looked up, and he stopped.

"Maestro has been most kind to us," she said. "My father repaired his house and bought two more goats with the money I earned."

"But I owe you much more than

that," continued the artist in his precise German manner, "because while you had no experience in sitting before a painter, yet you were so patient, so interested in my task, that I was bound to do good work."

"Maestro has been most kind —" repeated the girl, her lips quivering.

"And think of it;" continued Kohl. "A king kissed your hand. The grand Maximilian of Bavaria, who wants my picture for his great new museum, said that here was at least the real Italian peasant girl. He kissed your hand as an honor to all Italy."

Giovanna's eyes shone, but she was silent.

"I shall see you every time I return to Italy," returned William, "and I want you to remember me as a friend and a good comrade. We, have been good comrades Giovanna, have we not?"

She nodded bravely, but her race betrayed itself, and tears began to fill her eyes.

"And by great luck we did not fall in love with each other, Giovanna!"

"Pietro came and saw me every day," she said.

"Yes, Pietro." The young man

smiled. "He never trusted me. He came to sell his fruit every day —and to get a smile from you." Growing serious as he looked intently at the serene beauty of the young face before him, he added, lightly, "An artist who wants to work must not fall in love."

She did not answer.

"But now that we are going to part," he continued, "I wish to give you something as a remembrance of me." He drew a ring from his finger. It was a gold ring, shaped as a fish, with jaws yawning wide. The jaws held a ruby, and its dull shimmer came

and went with the flashes of sunlight through the hedge along the road.

"This is an old ring," he said, almost solemnly. "It was a keepsake in my family for almost a hundred years. Take it, little girl. The stone is chipped, but the gold is as pure as yourself. I painted a great picture, they say,—but you helped me. There would have been no picture without you. May all the Saints of Heaven protect you. Addio!"

He closed the girl's hand over the ring. Her little brown hand lay in his white, capable palm like a child's tiny fist. He bent over

and kissed the little hand reverently—yet as self-possessed and calm and unapproachable as the great Maximilian of Bavaria himself.

"Addio, Maestro," returned the girl. "You have been most kind. I shall pray to our dear Mother every night for your welfare."

She walked away primly, stopped, looked back and waved her hand with that unconscious, exquisite grace with which every Italian child possesses as naturally as the color of eyes and hair. And she smiled as bravely as only a woman will in a moment of distress.

"Addio!"

He remained where they had stood together, swinging his hat, until she disappeared around the bend.

The girl walked rapidly along the road until she reached the bend, whence she waved one more greeting. She smiled bravely until the foliage hid her from view, then the buoyancy died out her step, and she went on soberly. There were tears in her eyes still. There were more tears as she went on.

A gate loomed up beside the road. Many trees waved their crowns beyond, shading the roofs

of a group of houses, white-walled, with small windows. A whiff of the odors of many flowers floated over the white wall and stirred the fringes of acacias and of the little ferns in the crevices of the masonry. The gate was closed, and an old bell-rope hung beside it, ending in handle shaped as a cross.

Giovanna stopped and knelt beside a shrine in the wall close by the gate. As she said her prayers, she fumbled with the ring. She rose and looked about her, struggling between a fear and an impulse.

She pulled the rope, and a bell sounded within. She waited, her

hand on her bosom, tightly clasping the ring. Slow, shuffling steps approached the gate, and a small grill opened, disclosing the wrinkled face of an old monk. He looked at the girl without a greeting, immovable.

"For the blessed Lady of Tre Fontane," said Giovanna, reaching the ring toward the grill.

The monk took the ring, and held up his hand.

"Pax tecum et benedictio," he said. —And the opening closed. The ring was gone. Only the odors of Calla and Nerium remained as an incense from the pious offer-

ing of the jewel to the glorious Mother, the merciful Lady of the Abbey of Tre Fontane.

CONCLUSION

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The Abbot of Bethany faced his visitor with a friendly smile as they met in the small, but lofty study on the following morning.

"So you have been meditating on the chalice." he said. "Well, meditation is part of our business here. Indeed, I have done a little speculation on the same subject—and what do you think—our gift-book relates something about the ruby's history!"

The Abbot rose and turned to a

recess in the wall, from which he drew a large book bound in immortal vellum. —"This is our record of gifts," he said. "Let me see—"

His strong profile bent over the book, and the muscular fingers turned leaf on leaf.

—and somehow the visitor felt that the leaves of the book were symbolic of the lives that went into the great monastery whose austerity—and friendly spirit—surrounded him. Leaf on leaf: life on life; consecrated, fulfilled, their destinies attained.

Then the Abbot's sonorous voice roused him.

"Here is the entry," he said. "'A ruby, deposited at the gate on the sixth day of October, 1832, by one, *Giovanna, in memoriam Virginis Beatae*: A gold ring, shaped as a fish with jaws wide open. The jaws enclosed the ruby which is slightly'—ah!—'slightly chipped at one side.' The gold setting was used for some other purpose, but the ruby was sent to us. —The stone was injured, then, before we obtained it."

The visitor nodded.

"You see, I made a mistake yesterday," continued the Abbot, "in suspecting some workman. We shall leave the jewel where it is.

It undoubtedly came from the hands of a penitent sinner. The sacred use of her gift will help restore her peace with God."

"She must be dead years ago."

"Probably," assented the Abbot. "Death is an incident — like this flaw in the ruby. The main thing is that just as this chalice derives its dignity from its use — just in the same way are weak and sinful men and women sanctified by the use which God makes of their lives."

"I wonder if the ruby has an interesting history," suggested the visitor. "Now that we know the end, it would be a satisfaction to

know the beginning also. — This girl, Giovanna, now . . . . . "

The Abbot shook his head.

"We can make no mistake," he said, "in taking it for granted that she shared the fate of this ruby."

"And by this gift she surrendered her vanity, perhaps," mused the visitor, "and forgot —"

"She did that," assented the Abbot. "Perhaps more than that. Perhaps it was a very precious possession, but she could not sustain it. I venture to say that none of all those who ever possessed this ruby, could sustain the continued possession of it. Still, mankind goes on ransacking the world for

such things, lay their hands upon them, obtain them—keep them, even when there is no blessing in the winning of them. But when even dead things need to be consecrated and removed from the World, can you doubt that men and women find sustaining peace for their souls in obeying the same law?"

"Still, you would not discourage the healthy ambition of making use of what the world offers, to enrich your life,—would you, Reverend Father?"

The Abbot smiled.—"No," he said, "not if you put the question in those words. But surely, that

is obvious. Now if you train your will-power to renounce personally as readily as you accept personally what the world offers, then you see the problem in the full light of truth. Accept—oh yes, what would we not accept! Everything. Renounce,—and you will have eternal possession of what you desired: that is another lesson which we may gain from this chalice. The chipped ruby confirms the thesis."

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